

# The Psychology In Vedanta

“An Interview with Swami Dayananda”<sup>1</sup>

**Q. What do you see as the relationship between Psychology and Vedanta?**

**Swamiji:** In psychology, the therapist doesn't condemn a person. It is a very beautiful thing. He never condemns a person as evil. He tries to find out why a person is given to offenses, such as violence and crime. Without condemning the person, he tries to find in the person's background why there is such a pleasure in becoming a habitual offender. This is a benign approach because there is a total absence of condemnation. I was appalled at what I read in a book by Scott Peck, who wrote, *“The Road less Traveled”*. His book called *“People of the Lie”* is a book about people who lie. He calls them “evil people”, and sets out to prove that there is evil. He is a born-again CHristian who believes in evil and that there are people given to evil. He was a psychiatrist.

In psychology, there is total absence of condemnation; there is acknowledgement of habitual offence or crime, and then the effort to find the background. There is a similar approach in Vedanta. In the vision of Vedanta, a person, by virtue of his own essential nature is totally, absolutely, pure and free. Compassion, love, giving and sharing are all dynamic forms of this absolute happiness (*ānanda*). You are limitless fullness, complete, lacking nothing. So too, in the vision of Vedanta, the person is never condemned. These are two different levels of approach. But the approach itself is very similar.

Suppose you want to help a person. What do you do? In therapy, you try to make the person understand that there is an order. When you say that in a given background, this behavior is expected, it means that you are accepting an order. Vedanta will go one step further by saying that the order is the Lord or God (*īśvara*). First you validate the person. Then the therapy becomes a process of helping the person see that he or she is all right. Being in order means that it was appropriate for him or her to have acted that way due to the background and

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circumstances. Relatively, the therapist will say that in the overall scheme of things, there is an order for the sadness, an order for the anger, etc. One has got a right for every emotion. The person is validated, including his background, emotions, etc.

Vedanta does the same thing. It points out that you are already free. That *you are already free* is not only a fact, it is a method of teaching. Just like in therapy, there is a method. In therapy, you make the person see. In Vedanta also, we try to help the person see. In therapy, you create situations to help the person see and let things out. You are allowing the person to talk the anguish out and talk the anger out. Thus things are appropriately ventilated.

In Vedanta, all these are considered to be a *means* of assimilating the knowledge of oneself or (*sādhana*). Finally, Vedanta, by constant exposure, helps to make the person see. It's a process whereby, over a period of time, the clarity grows. In spite of situations, you come to find that you are okay with yourself. And we know that it is necessary to see that I am okay in spite of other situations, whatever the human situations are—emotions, needs, and so on. In spite of that, there is a possibility of seeing yourself free—I am free enough to have emotions. So in psychology, you validate emotions and in Vedanta, also, we do the same. We validate everything, including the basic person.

I find that there is a certain similarity between psychology and Vedanta at different levels. One is the emotional level. The other is the basic level. In psychology, when you try to point out the background, which one is not totally aware of, there is transference. The person in the therapy transfers the blame to the therapist. The therapist asks a question like, “At any time did you have this kind of experience when you were a child?” So it's very clear that one is unconscious; and until the discovery of the reality, the therapist will become the mother or father, etc. The therapist is blamed for no fault of his own. At this particular time, the therapist is able to point out things because he is informed. He is trained in how to handle that situation.

In therapy, two things are clear. There is a veil of ignorance. Something is as though covered in the unconscious. Then there is a projection onto a person, place, or thing born out of that ignorance. In Vedanta, the veil of ignorance is called (*āvaraṇa*). The projection is called (*vikṣepa*). There is a veil of ignorance in the sense of not knowing who I am. One does not question whether I am, but

who I am and what I am. The vision of Vedanta: *what I am is Brahman*, that I am absolutely free is not known. In that place or locus of self-ignorance, there is a projection. Thus I feel that I am a limited being, a wanting person (*samsārin*).

Therefore, there is *vikṣepa* and *āvaraṇa* in Vedanta, and also, in psychology at a relative level. It is the same power that covers and projects in both psychology and Vedanta. It's like in the dream; there is a cover. At the time of the dream, whatever you are in waking life is covered over completely. Then something different is projected. This power of veiling and projection is there in everybody. I think it is necessary in the case of the child, to save the child from pain. Here, I think that the unconscious is a must. Therefore, *āvaraṇa* and *vikṣepa* are there at the psychological level. At the basic level, spoken of in Vedanta, they are there also. In this way, they are similar.

In Vedanta, there are places where there cannot be more emphasis regarding the psychological-emotional well being. It is talked about and elaborated so much—things like compassion, accommodation, values, and attitudes. Attitudes are all psychological. Values we can say are ethical, but attitudes are psychological. Erosion of the common ethical value structure is due to psychological pressure. Since it is so well recognized, the neutralizing of this kind of pressure is available in the society. In therapy, it is handled in a different way. It is said that in life one has to grow into that person who can handle all the psychological pressures of parenthood or whatever comes along in living one's life. That person becomes a candidate for Vedanta. That's why there are two things that we talk about. One level is the person's eligibility (*adhikāritvam*) which includes emotional stability and a general sense of security. In this way, Vedanta addresses the reality of the person's emotional life. How it helps solve the problem is by cognitive changes and a way of life.

Cumulative change works with the cognitive person because the value structures must necessarily undergo change. Thereafter, the pressures become less. When one has a bigger picture, then what were once big things become small things. Suppose I have a big goal. I know that I am limitless, that I am infinite. That is very big. Then, all other things become relatively small. The various forms of lack, which create all those pressures, become less. That is what we call emotional well-being in Vedanta.

**Q. Can you describe the relationship between the self and the mind and define these terms as they are understood in Vedanta?**

**Swamiji:** In Vedanta, we have words like *indriyāṇi*, *manah*, *buddhiḥ*, *cittam*, and *aḥaṅkāraḥ*. We have to understand it that way. From there, we come to what we mean by mind, etc. The five senses of perception (*indriyaḥ* or *indriyāṇi*) are hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and the sense of touch all over the body. Then, we have the faculty of thinking behind these five senses. This faculty is in the form of thought modifications. It is what we call *vṛtti*. *Vṛtti* means a thought, thoughts or thought-forms. We further define *vṛtti* by three main types, although there are so many of them. One type is *mana*, another is *buddhi*, and the third type is *citta*.

Thus, we are defining the *vṛtti*'s as a three-fold manifestation. *Mana* is generally referred to as the mind. Emotions, desires, doubt, and vacillations are all *mana*. Then we have another type of thinking where there is deliberate enquiry. When there is resolution, decision and will, we call it *buddhi*. The process of reasoning and inference, etc. all comes under that. Then recollection and memory, we call *citta*. So these three – *mana*, *buddhi*, and *citta* we call *antaḥkāraṇa* or, in general, mind. The one who owns the mind is the ego (*aḥam*). This is the individual—the 'I' thought or the one who employs the mind. Therefore, the ego (*aḥaṅkāra*) is the sense of "I-ness". Any ownership, knowership, enjoyership, doership—all "ships" belong to (*aḥam*).

We always look at the ego through the mind, the *buddhi*, the *citta* and the body, or the senses. Even with reference to the external world, you look at yourself as "I am a son; I am a daughter; I am a husband or I am a wife". When you look at yourself from an external standpoint, it is the ego. We are just giving a definition of this ego from different standpoints. The ego (*aḥaṅkāra*) is the self for the time being. Vedanta questions whether this ego can really be the self, since in deep sleep you do not have the ego. But then, you find that you are there. It means you are able to relate to that sleep as 'my sleep' when you say, "I slept like a log", etc. You were there in sleep, correct? So, I was there before sleep, I am here after sleep and in sleep, also, I was there. This is one way of saying it. In a certain way, you can also say, "I was aware of my sleep." "I slept" is an experience. "I slept well" is an experience. That "I didn't see anything in particular" is also an

experience. So, in deep sleep, I was there. In a moment of joy, I am there. The ego that I know—the individual ‘I’, the self that I am familiar with—is not there.

Therefore, from various standpoints, when you look at what the self is, Vedanta says, “The ego is the self: the self is not the ego”. The self is the invariable in all situations. Whether you have doubt or emotion, whether you are exploring or have deliberate thinking or decision making, whether you recollect or remember, it is the self that is invariable in all your experiences. In all situations, one thing is present, and that one thing is what you want to be present. “I am” is present because all these experiences are strung in the self. The self that is present in all these experiences is the eternal, timeless self.

Vedanta says that the *self is simple consciousness* as such. While the ego is consciousness, consciousness appears as though variable in the ego. What the ego is, and what the ego is aware of are both the same self. So the mind is the self. The mind is consciousness. Every thought is consciousness. The “I”-thought or ego-thought also is consciousness. The thought of any object is consciousness; when the mind thinks of a tree, the tree thought is consciousness. So consciousness is invariable and it is the self. Is that consciousness which is the very self alone, related to the mind? In what way is it related to the mind? Really speaking, it is not related to the mind. The mind is related to the self in the sense that the mind *is* the self, having no independent existence separate from the self. But the self is not the mind. Just like this table is purely wood and never apart from wood, while the wood itself is not merely the table. The wood will continue to be even when the table ceases to be. This is the relationship, the *relationship between what is and what appears to be*.

**Q. How does Vedanta define ‘ego’, and how is the individual ego created or developed according to Vedanta?**

**Swamiji:** Vedanta doesn’t look at the ego as an independent entity devoid of identification with other relational things like the physical body, the breath (*prāṇa*) the five sense organs, the mind, the intellect (*buddhi*), and memory (*citta*). Without identifying with any of these, where is the ego? The ego has to lean on something or the other. The ego itself consists of the sum of past memories or experiences (*saṁskāras*), our own dispositions and predilections, etc. which, taken together, makes a person different from all others. It is variable also; so it never

stays the same. Now it's a happy ego, now it's a confused ego, now it has got some clarity. With reference to certain facts, the ego is clear. With certain other things, it is not very clear. And it is sometimes conditioned by one's own unconscious (*kaṣāya*). One's emotional life especially, and sometimes the ego's response to the world is dependent upon its' own *kaṣāya*. This includes it's own knowledge, past memories; it's own upbringing and also the culture, society, and so on. This ego includes all of these.

The response of the ego to an external situation or an internal situation depends upon a number of factors. Therefore, there is no big discussion in Vedanta about its development. Vedanta doesn't talk about psychology so much. It only deals with psychology to the extent that it has to for a sane, objective, and dispassionate life. It doesn't deal with it as a subject matter, but there is adequate discussion about the emotional life and how one can be more objective. There are complete discussions dealing with neutralizing likes and dislikes by understanding the values which help to promote healthy attitudes, and thus, emotional maturity. For all these, there is discussion. But there is not a very big discussion on the development of the ego. There is considerable discussion on how one obtains language skills and how a child picks up a language. There is a lot of linguistic or language based discussion in Vedanta because Vedanta is using the medium of language for unfolding the truth of the self, the world and God.

**Q. (a) What is meant by bondage or self-ignorance and what is the root cause for this? (Include an explanation of *anyonyādhyāsa* or mutual superimposition)**

**Q. (b) Can you explain why the condition of living in the state of bondage leads to causing emotional pain and suffering?**

**Swamiji:** Whatever I don't want to have, but I can't get rid of is bondage. In Sanskrit, it is called *bandha* or *bandhana*. It is derived from the Sanskrit root word, *bandh*, to bind. The bondage itself is *bandha*. It means you are bound. One cannot extricate oneself from certain things, which he or she wants to get rid of. What is it that one does not want? Pain and sorrow, limitation, fear, old age and being subject to disease and mortality are just a few things that most of us do not want.

When one doesn't love certain things or doesn't like certain things, but cannot get rid of them, they become bondage for the person. It is that wanting to get out of something and not being able to. I want to get out of this struggle to become happy but I cannot rid myself of the struggle. I want to be free from insecurity, but I find myself helplessly insecure. That's bondage. Being insecure is bondage. Being bound by time is bondage. Being bound by various limitations is bondage. Who is it that feels this bondage? Vedanta discusses it this way. The physical body does not feel the bondage. Neither does the mind. The mind is a *kāraṇa*; it is simply a means or instrument.

The person or the ego feels the bondage. No matter who the person is, wherever there is "I" sense, there is a sense of bondage also. That I want to be different from being what I am is bondage. In Vedanta, we say that a life of becoming is a life of bondage. In one word, we call it *saṁsāra*. "I am a *saṁsārin*" means *I am not acceptable to myself as I am now*. That is *saṁsāra*. A *saṁsārin* is the one who has *saṁsāra*. This is the one who appears *to become* a *saṁsārin* because—*he or she wants to become*.

I cannot but struggle to become because I am not acceptable to myself as I am. I struggle to become that person in whom I can be free, meaning in whom I find total acceptance, complete acceptability. Suppose I become that person in terms of wealth, in terms of health or in terms of any accomplishment that I gain. Then afterwards, once again, I want to become. Thus, I am always in the process of becoming. That is *saṁsāra*.

This ongoing act of becoming itself reveals that there is no way of becoming free. You don't *become* free, because the very fact that you want to become reveals that you are not free. The attempt to become free is a denial of freedom, according to Vedanta, because it betrays a self non-acceptance. We can say that this is the *original sin* or the original problem. That constant wanting to become or needing to become somebody else is the original problem. And in that somebody else, I expect to see myself as a free person, free from want, who won't need to become any more. Suppose one has pursued a life of becoming for forty years. The remaining 40 or 50 years I may have is not going to be any different. The recognition of this is what is sometimes called the *middle age crisis*.

So freedom from this constant attempt to become; from becoming itself, is called *mokṣa*. One eventually comes to recognize that freedom from becoming cannot come by becoming. How can I become free from being a limited person when I am limited as far as I can see? All the features about myself are found wanting. If I look at myself, an individual ego, it is like a compartment. It is an advocate of a lot of things. The ego itself doesn't exist. When you look at yourself from one standpoint or the other, you become wanting. From the physical body standpoint in terms of health, in terms of strength, in terms of height, I am found wanting. In terms of pervasiveness, time or mortality (being subject to old age and death), I am wanting.

Then in terms of mind, if I look at myself emotion-wise, I cannot always command a cheerful mind; thus wanting. In terms of knowledge, I am always wanting. In terms of my capacity to remember, I'm again wanting. What I want to recollect doesn't come. The moment the situation is not there and I need not recollect anymore, or the person is gone and I don't need to remember his name, then it comes, thus wanting. And the storing capacity also is wanting. Everything is wanting. Certain memories that I don't want to have keep appearing. So what I don't want to have also is there, thus, *I am wanting* in terms of the need to remove it.

So it appears that any way I look at myself, I am found wanting. In terms of my own partial viewpoint, I see myself as wanting. I always wish that I had not done a few things because I feel guilty of commission. Perhaps I had hurt someone. Then I wish I had done a few things I had omitted, that could have made the situation better. Vedanta talks about that. *kim aham sadhunākaravam kim aham pāpam akaravam iti*. Why didn't I do the right thing? Why did I do the wrong thing? This is there in everybody. There is guilt. Also, there are so many hurts. Why did others not do the right thing? Why did that person do this to me? Why did this person not do this for me? So, in terms of hurt, I am wanting. In terms of guilt, I am wanting—wanting in the sense that I wish I had no guilt. I wish I had no hurt. So this wanting all the way is what the ego is.

Looking at oneself as a daughter, son, mother, father, again I am found wanting. I wish my mother was a little different, my father was a little different, and so here I'm wanting. Money-wise and relationship-wise, I see myself wanting, always wanting. But this wanting person doesn't like to be wanting. It is not

natural. Why? Because I cannot have a sense of want centered on my self and totally accept myself at the same time. It is not possible.

In the reality of being a *wanting* person, there is a denial of self-acceptance. Therefore, I feel I have to fix up this situation of being a wanting person by fixing up so many things. I have to fix up my mother. I have to fix up my father. I have to fix up the world. How? This is what we are doing. We try to fix up the world, fix up countries, fix up people. Can we finally fix all these things up? No doubt, we have to do certain things, but nothing seems to really stay fixed up. What we do leads to another situation, which again continues to need fixing and so on.

So it's a continuous process going on and it's never-ending. Individually speaking, I see myself in a non-winning situation. Struggle alone is necessary, but without an end to the struggle, it's not a struggle worth making. When I am very sure that there is no end to the struggle, then why should I struggle? But can I give up this struggle? No, because I cannot accept myself, so I cannot but struggle, and I begin to see the uselessness of the struggle. So one is just getting on with one's life and not really living life fully. When one just gets on with one's life, it's kind of a half-life in the sense that people become emotionally numb. Why? Because the human freedom of expression, the freedom to grow, the freedom to express one's fullness seems thwarted. There is a kind of dumbness (something hidden, not known) and thus an emotional numbness to the situations.

So there is a struggle without meaning. This is the bondage. Afterwards, there are the hopes, the occasional happiness—the paperback promise. The paperback books you read talk about the human potential and all of that. These are written by the self-made people who offer you some hope. Then afterwards you discover the new-age promises. Yoga, alfalfa and so many things, all promise something different. We want to start somewhere again anew. So we begin to notice and look into the self-help groups and various kinds of alternative type things, etc.

Vedanta recognizes the struggle here as meaningful. It is not a meaningless struggle. It has a meaning. What is the meaning? That *the struggle is meaningless* is the meaning. That is the meaning of the struggle. Now, please look into the

other option open to you. Either you struggle, which is meaningless, or without struggle, you should solve the problem. If without struggle, you have to solve the problem, it can only be a problem of ignorance, self-ignorance.

Therefore, one has got to look into and understand what the self is. Maybe the self is not the one that you think you are. The self that you know is just a composite. In terms of seeing, in terms of hearing, it is a seer, a hearer. Minus or stripped of all that please see the self. Without being a seer, without being a hearer, without being a son, without being a daughter, is there a self? A basic self must necessarily be there. Perhaps that is the self that you come across when you are happy. Otherwise, in spite of all this struggling life, one cannot find oneself happy, even occasionally. The fact that one is happy occasionally itself proves that in order to be happy I need not struggle. Maybe that self that obtains when I am happy is the truth of the self, the self of which I have experience but no knowledge. So maybe there is a cognitive pursuit open to me, a pursuit of recognizing what I am.

Vedanta offers a solution to the problem, saying that there is *no absolutely real* problem. In terms of relations, or relatively, we address problems of maturity. But one assumes there is a problem of essential self-limitation, and then goes about trying to solve it. That assumption is wrong. If the assumption is wrong, then you have to re-shuffle your thinking and re-examine yourself. You have to inquire into what is the very core of yourself. Is it possible that I am always a changing self or can my self be unchanging at all times?

Therefore, this “Who am I” question, becomes very, very significant. How am I going to look at myself? What is the means of looking at myself? In this process, the whole Vedanta teaching becomes a means of knowledge. In the vision of Vedanta, *you are the whole*. In that you have the big picture—the vision of a free, stable and unchanging self. That I am the whole is the solution. If I am the problem, the problem is one of being confused about myself. If I feel split into so many parts, then seeing the fact that ‘I am whole’ should necessarily be the solution. All the parts should fall in place by recognizing one homogeneous whole. If I am not acceptable to myself, and the self is by nature acceptable, then I have to discover that I am acceptable to myself. The self that is not different than the whole is acceptable because it cannot be better than it is.

Nobody really needs to fix up the self. Though one has been trying to fix up the self all along, it is already free. If this is true, it means I have to completely re-look at myself. In this process, there is necessarily a complete shift of emphasis. When such a shift takes place, with reference to the entire unconscious also, there is more trust in oneself. There is more trust in the bigger picture. You relax, and when you relax, the unconscious can release all the unresolved problems. If there are problems, the person can go on to understand and resolve things that help him or her mature emotionally. Therefore, support systems, prayer, and therapy all become useful for further clarity. In this way, even therapy becomes a means or *sādhana* for gaining self-knowledge. A relative degree of emotional maturity and stability should be there for gaining more clarity in self-knowledge. In fact, when you have the bigger picture, it's not only much easier, but essential for the growth of the person.

Once there is such a thing as self-ignorance, there will be self-confusion also. The self is self-evident. Therefore, "I am" is self-evident. That *I am wanting* is a conclusion, a wrong conclusion in fact. But I have no other way of taking myself. What else will I take myself for? I can't take myself to be anything else other than my body, which I am intimately connected to. So, my body-mind-sense complex becomes me. And that is limited. This is what we call superimposition. Here, the self is "miss-taken" for the body-mind-sense complex. That the body-mind-sense complex is myself is okay. You can say that from a standpoint. Suppose you say, "I am forty years old, fifty years old". Then you are referring to yourself from a standpoint, which is fine. If somebody says "I am an engineer, I am a doctor", that's fine from that standpoint.

But then, what is I? That's the problem. Here we have a mutual superimposition. In Sanskrit, it is called (*anyonya-adhyāsa*). The self (*ātman*) is taken to be the body-mind-sense complex. The body-mind-sense complex is taken to be the *ātman*. When two things are mixed up, and each is taken to be the other, this is recognized as a mutual super-imposition or *anyonya-adhyāsa*.

B is A. A is not B. That is Vedanta. The seer is "I", but I am not the seer. If I am the seer, I will be seeing all the time. I am the hearer, with reference to hearing, seer with reference to seeing, knower with reference to knowing. But I, myself, am just a being, a simple conscious being. Then what is that being? Here is where Vedanta becomes a means of knowledge. If the true nature of the "I", the

person, or the being is not known, I will be wanting. I will be subject to all the pains and changes of mortality, etc. Then the unconscious will remain with all the unresolved emotions. Even for a normal unconscious, (not highly loaded), assuming the child grew up in a functional home and the childhood evolved normally without any serious problems, still there are unconscious needs. Then the conscious waking life is full of failures, disappointments, regrets, guilt, and hurt. So many things are involved, and therefore, emotional problems are unavoidable in human life.

In fact, this emotional life is the price you pay for freedom from the problem of emotion. If one has a certain emotional pain, one should learn from it. The learning should be uplifting. If I learn something from it, that's the price I pay for what I have learned. Otherwise, I am stuck with only pain now, pain from the past, fear of pain in the future, and I do not learn anything from it. Emotional pain leads you to something. It takes you somewhere. Therefore, we don't want to bypass emotions or the emotional life.

At a time when emotions have a secret to give, we should take them very seriously, but not give them more reality than they deserve. We don't dismiss them as nothing, nor do we take them as everything. They lead you to something, something more profound. So emotional pain is there and, even physical pain is there drawing your attention. Suppose physically some part of the body is giving you pain, it demands your attention. So too, emotional pain draws your attention and you have to learn from it. What does it convey to me? It all leads you to *mokṣa*, really speaking, or to freedom.

Any enquiring person comes with a background in terms of a culture and education. That background seems to be a very important factor because it helps to give the person a direction and makes him or her available for a given enquiry. If what one seeks is available in the culture itself, then that is very good. One knows exactly what to seek. Like here, in the American culture, therapy is well known. Therapy is available, and it doesn't carry much stigma. Once you know there is such help available, then you seek help. If somebody is suffering from alcoholism, and there is such a thing as AA support groups available, one can seek help right there. So if, in a culture, this kind of spiritual truth or pursuit is available, people will be naturally given to that pursuit. Emotional problems can lead to that. In American culture, during the 1960's and 70's, there was a

kind of discovery or enquiry with respect to a more meaningful spiritual pursuit. Many people wrote off the hippies as idiots or radicals, but it was not an ordinary thing. There was an awareness of something more fundamental, more basic. Whenever such a thing happens, it looks very drastic, but it brought about a certain change in the awareness of the society.

**Q Can you talk about the self as the source of love and happiness and specifically describe what is happening psychologically when the self-ignorant person seeks happiness in the form of fulfilling worldly desires?**

**Swamiji:** If you look at a moment of happiness, certain things become clearly evident. In a happy moment, there is self-acceptance. There is world acceptance also. The present world confronted by you is accepted at that time. What has passed in your life is also accepted. Your past doesn't inhibit your happy moment. Neither do your future fears inhibit the happy moment. Your credit card situation does not inhibit your happy moment. And any complexes that you may have also do not inhibit that moment.

In a happy moment, the subject-object get fused, and there is happiness. This fusion of subject-object doesn't mean that the object becomes the subject or that the subject becomes the object. No. The object remains the object, like music is music. And the subject is the subject. What you love is recognized as an object. You are the subject, in this case, the limited self. Here, the subject as though becomes the object due to ignorance of the nature of the self, being object-free.

So, there are two different objects. But still there is fusion here inside. That flame of fusion is what we call happiness. If there is an object that pleases you, you call it love. That happiness alone is love. In reference to another object it is called love. In reference to your-self, it is called happiness. The object you love pleases you. If it doesn't evoke the pleased self, there is no love. Love falls out and there is no falling in love. Once you place conditions on why I love you, it is always a nuisance. Why? Because all conditions are never fulfilled.

We are not trying to place conditions on what one should or should not do. We are saying that when there is love, there is the pleased self. The object of love evokes the pleased self. Really speaking, the love that is extended to the external object is the love for the pleased self that is reflected in the object outside. That is

the truth. So the dynamic form of happiness (*ānanda*) is love which itself undergoes some changes in the form of compassion, giving, understanding, sharing, and caring. All these are one emotion, really speaking. The fact about your-self, *that happiness that you are by nature, is love.*

That happiness recognized in the subject-object fusion reveals that the self is limitlessness, which is also wholeness or completeness. It cannot be abridged. Nor can it be edited. It is always the same. It can only be diminished by some kind of distorted thinking; it can look as though it is covered. It cannot be covered. This is a fact. It remains always the same because limitlessness is the nature of consciousness. Consciousness is not subject to time, nor is it subject to space. Time is an object of consciousness. Space is object of consciousness. Consciousness is spatially limitless and time-wise limitless. That is the person's nature. It is you. Therefore, the more I understand myself, the easier it is to be more loving, caring and compassionate. It is just natural. There is nothing great about understanding myself. It is very natural to seek for personal freedom or *mokṣa*, just as natural as it is to seek for security, comforts, pleasures and a harmonious and happy life.

We don't differentiate worldly desires from all other desires. Desires are desires. It is entirely the Lord (*Īśvara*), even that desiring capacity that you have. And desiring is not a matter for guilt. Desiring and having ambition is all a part of oneself. But the idea that by fulfilling all my desires I am going to be happy is wrong. Fulfilling desires so that I can be more comfortable, etc. are privileges. This is objectivity, which is very important in a spiritual pursuit.

**Q. What is liberation according to Vedanta and by what process does it take place? And can you describe the relationship between liberation from bondage and the process of developing psychological maturity? In what ways are they the same or different?**

**Swamiji:** Liberation is freedom from self-confusion, freedom from error about oneself. That's liberation. That is freedom. That also implies a lot of other things. There is freedom from becoming (*samsāra*). Then afterwards, there is freedom from birth and death etc., according to the karma model. In the model of karma, each person is born according to his or her own karma. The individual

(*jīva*) assumes different bodies at different times. And when an individual assumes a human body or equivalent to the human body enjoying a free will, one will gather karma. Otherwise one would be mechanical and there could be no new karma.

Whenever one has free will, one can earn positive karma or comfortable situations (*puṇya*). Or, one can earn uncomfortable situations (*pāpa*). So, you can gather *puṇya* and *papa* only in a human body, only when the *jīva* or individual has free will—a human body or equivalent to human body, we don't know, but you must have free will. Only then, can one gather new karma. Therefore, this cycle is self-perpetuating. It is beginningless. Its cause is ignorance, which has no beginning.

Confusion, therefore, has no beginning. It means taking myself to be a doer (*kartā*), to be an experiencer (*bhoktā*). It means taking myself to be limited. This particular mistake is due to self-disowning, self-ignorance. And this will continue as long as one is under this spell. It is very similar to a long dream. In the dream, as we know it, everything is *as though* real, as long as one is under the spell of the dream. So this is a long dream with respect to the individual. Until one wakes up to the reality of oneself, the person is bound. Once it is clearly known that the self is not bound by any limitation, that the self is free from karma, free from doership, free from birth and death, this dreamlike bondage cannot stage a comeback.

Therefore, liberation or freedom is from this error, this ignorance centered on myself. And the process is the process of knowing the truth of myself. It has two parts. One is the emotional maturity. This also implies a life conforming to *dharma* and that is a long process. The whole lifetime one has to grow into that person. In this two-fold process, one is growing into that person who is emotionally secure, who has relative freedom from wrong attitudes and other local problems. This is the first freedom.

The second freedom is by knowledge. So, it is a two-fold freedom. And it is highly connected to emotional life because there is a self-growth involved in all this. Only after self-growth can there be self-discovery. Self-discovery is not growth. The self is already limitless. You don't grow into limitlessness. But you grow into a person who can own up that limitlessness, who can understand and

assimilate oneself. And that doesn't take place unless you ventilate the unconscious and resolve the hurt and guilt centered on the self. It all gets taken care of over a period of time. Therefore, a life of prayer is so important. A life of *dharma* and prayer, a life of growth and growing is called yoga. That growing is a life of yoga when there is an end in view, when the bigger picture is clearly recognized. Therefore the yoga includes all disciplines like values and healthy attitudes etc.

**Q. What are the emotional benefits that result from liberation?**

**Swamiji:** Emotionally, unless we are more or less free, we cannot have that knowledge. The liberating knowledge one can't really have unless one has gone through the process of emotional growth. What are the benefits of liberation? I would put it the other way—*liberation is a benefit of emotional growth*. Liberation itself is a benefit of emotional growth. We are not putting it the other way. We do not put the cart before the horse. We grow into that person who can understand. That person is emotionally mature. One who is emotionally mature is one who is able to manage one's emotional life, more or less, with a certain composure (*samatvam*). That certain self-satisfaction and self-image, all that is to be taken care of. Therefore, we don't bypass a solid emotional structure. Emotional needs must necessarily be satisfied. Thus we also have to take care of these things.

**Q. Does Vedanta include any concept equivalent to the unconscious in psychology, and if so, what is the concept, and how is it made meaningful regarding the psychology of the individual?**

**Swamiji:** We have an equivalent concept of *saṁskāra* or *kaṣāya*, which is a better word. *Sa kaṣāyam vijāniyāt samah prāptam na vicālayet*. May one understand that one has *kaṣāya*. It's advice that is given here. If one has certain types of emotion for which one is not able to find immediate causes, or one has situations which cause over-reaction etc., then one has to know that he or she has *kaṣāya*. And if one does have *kaṣāya*, how is one going to process that *kaṣāya*? One can process or resolve *kaṣāya* by allowing more Īśvara to come into one's life through contemplation, meditation and a prayerful life. Let go—let Īśvara be. Let go. Don't fight with your emotions. Never fight with emotions. It will all get

twisted. Welcome fear. Use support systems. Use prayer. Use your will. At the same time, resolve the anger, etc. by some form of expression like sharing.

Sharing neutralizes grief. In India, after death, there is a period of bereavement. They have a period of grief, so they do not keep it inside. They make the people affected, the bereaved persons, cry. People connected go and make them cry. Even if they don't want to cry, they make them cry so that the grief comes out. Then there is a one-year grief period where they miss all the festivals. They don't allow it to be a normal year. They use the entire year for grieving it out. All festivals are avoided and there are certain things they do every day. Like in front of the house, they will have *rangoli*. Daily, they will make geometrical patterns using rice powder. Ants and birds will come and eat the rice powder and so it's a kind of *yajña* or daily offering. It's like welcoming *Lakṣmī*, Lord of *Lakṣmī* to the house. It's a welcome thing that, they will do for the entire year. For that year, by sharing the grief or letting it out, it gets processed. They do without so many things and a lot of talking is involved. So, this is the culture itself.

The culture and the support system take care of the psychological well being. Even though, the belief is there that nobody dies, that everybody is re-born, still they don't dismiss the fact that the person is not going to be there forever in the same form. They acknowledge the fact that there is a void, a permanent void. They accept that and talk it out all the time. All the omissions and commissions, are talked out, so that the grief can be permanently resolved. This is an emotional commitment. Whatever way one chooses, be it prayer, support system, meditation or something else, this *kaṣāya* or unconscious is taken care of. In the Hindu culture, there was no therapy, just as in the earlier western culture there was no therapy. But they had a good support system like teachers, family, friends, neighbors and others. The more structure that was there, the less heavy was the unconscious.

In the western culture also, there were very good structures and family values and you knew exactly what you were going to do. Competition was not very big. The economic structure was mainly agricultural. They had similar values and life was simpler. When the lifestyle is structured, there is more sense of security and predictability and it is easier for people to relate to each other. And the various pre-schools were not there. I think that this is one of the most damaging things that modern society has introduced. I feel that sixty to seventy-

five percent of the therapists will have no job if we remove the pre-schools. If the children go to school when they are five, there should be no problem. The logic is very simple. The formation of the unconscious is nearly complete after four to four and a half years. There is a frozen child. Afterwards there is a conscious life with conscious problems.

So the conscious problems are one type of problem; that is a different type of problem. But when the problems are in the unconscious, it means that you cannot do anything about it. Thus you come under the spell of anger, loneliness, the sense of not being at home with oneself, problems of intimacy and trust, etc. It's all in the unconscious and one doesn't know what it is all about. Between the cognitive growth and conscious life, there is no connection. That includes Vedanta also. One can be very good in one's understanding of Vedanta. Clarity may be there, but still the unconscious can take one for a ride. Until it is processed, it's a problem.

Therefore, it is better to avoid the unconscious getting heavier. If you are sending the two and a half to three year old child to school, what will the child think? The child doesn't know, "I am being sent to school for my own good." The child will think, "My mother doesn't like me, and therefore I am banished." Since the child feels incomplete without mother, it goes on with a sense of insecurity and helplessness. Therefore the second year, third year, and fourth year become a problem. Although the Montessori and other forms of pre-schooling may be good in so many ways, during these times, the child has to be with the mother. The schooling should not separate the child from the mother. So I have started a school in India where the child has to come with the mother. I hope to bring about that revolution. Montessori schools came within the last sixty to one hundred years. Before that, there were no schools which children attended at such a very young ages. So, we should get rid of this. We can make use of the Montessori method by bringing up the child, challenging the child to help the child pick up some extra IQ by giving situations where the child has to figure out more things. That's all very good. But that should be done along with the mother, so that the child does not feel banished.

I feel that the emotional issues we now have, our society did not have before, either in the west or in the east. Modern issues were not there and not because of modern life being more complex or anything. These pre-schools can be and are

villains of the peace. And I have no doubts about that. I am highly convinced that nobody should separate the child from the mother. At least mother should be there in those early formative years. Then the child is complete for a healthy upbringing. It's connected—otherwise it's alienated. When the core person is alienated, you have to connect the person to the Lord, Īśvara. There is no other way. Only Vedanta will help.

Therefore in Vedanta we are connecting people to Īśvara again, all the way, cognitively. And that cognitive light should percolate and light up the unconsciousness, and surface it until it gets ventilated—*śamaḥ prāptam vicālayet*. Our masters recognized this. In the seat of meditation you handled that, throughout your lifetime. So allow all the bubbles of thought to come and surface. Allow the emotions to come and never overlook or try to suppress them. Just allow them to go. Another thing is, with insight, remain dispassionate, *nisaṅgo bhavet*, remain dispassionate. Further, *nāsvādhayet rasam asam*. If there is any happiness or overwhelming condition there, don't just sit there and enjoy it. Don't allow yourself to be overwhelmed by joy. With knowledge, know that happiness to be myself. Assimilate that happiness. That's why in meditation, I always say assimilate. Acknowledge any peace or anything that you experience. With any comfort, assimilate that I am comfortable by nature. When you assimilate, that is how you let the light percolate and light up the unconscious, slowly healing by that cognitive understanding. Whatever is there will surface slowly, over a period of time. In Vedanta, this is how it is managed and has been by the Sage's (*ṛṣi's*) of yore. Nowadays, because of pre-school classes and some lack in structure, we need to have various support systems. So a lot of prayer and more Īśvara in one's life is the answer.